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March 17, 2014

Members of the Public Health Committee,

I am writing to you to request your support for Bill No HB5558, which would expand services for those living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. My son, Garrett is 13 years old and will soon become an adult. My son is a teenager with Autism. He is verbal, creative, incredibly musically talented, yet he has trouble in communications and social interactions, which hampers his functionality in the "typical" world we live in. He is out placed from the public schools, as he cannot be in an environment that is too stimulating. He is in an environment that is nurturing but firm with the learning style (one on one and ABA based) that he can actually learn – academically and socially. He has to travel 45 minutes each way to get to school every day. His frustrations led to behaviors that are not acceptable and this requires behavior management that is not always covered by insurance, therefore he does not always get all he needs, outside of school, as the cost is staggering.

I fear for my son's future as an adult. I do not know if he will be able to function on his own. However, because he has Autism (not Asperger's – the "highest" functioning, but also not "lower" functioning or nonverbal), he falls in a grey area of services. He will continually need help with navigating socially, behaviorally and with basic life skills, yet he still has the potential to be a contribution to the community. He is smart and talented. Yet the state of Connecticut does not provide services for adults who have Autism Spectrum Disorders but do not have mental retardation. With all the services my son receives, he falls into this category.

Do you know that I just recently received a letter from DDS, State of Connecticut, Eligibility Unit, Autism spectrum services division, with the following statement: "Based upon the information submitted, this individual (my son) meets the eligibility criteria and is therefore eligible to receive services from the Autism Spectrum Services Division. Although Garrett meets the eligibility requirements for the program, we currently do not have an opening. Garrett's name has been added to the waiting list and you will be notified if an opening becomes available." IF an opening becomes available?! I've been told this could be at least five years. This is such a shame. We can do better. I still have trouble with the word IF and no definitive of when services will be available. What about now and what about after 21?

Bill No HB5558 which would expand services for those living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. A new section would establish a pilot program that will allow for the individuals with the highest level of need who are difficult to place to have an opportunities to receive a high level of service from a provider who has clinical expertise in providing applied behavior analysis. (Historically, these individuals have been placed out of state or in public institutions. But now our public institutions have been, or are in the process of being closed and are not accepting any new cases, and the state rarely places people out of state. This means that there are very few, and in some cases no options for some individuals with very high levels of need. This often means that families are left to deal with the most challenging behaviors with very insufficient assistance and supports.)

I urge you to support it Bill HB5558. Garrett can live and work in the community as a productive member of society but not without the appropriate supports. This bill will allow for him to access these supports. I can be reached at 203-331-8077 or bsnewman@optonline.net. I look forward to discussing this important issue with you at your earliest convenience. I thank you for your time.

Best,

Bonnie Sue Newman

Mother of Garrett, a teenager with Autism